

THE TIME IS NOW

By Aaron Martin (LA'94)

Ryan Walters is considered one of the most promising young football coaches in the country.

When he was [named the head coach at Purdue](#) in December at age 36, Walters became the fourth-youngest head coach in FBS football—the top level of collegiate football competition. Now 37, this former college safety is taking on the top job for the first time after impressing as a defensive coordinator at the University of Missouri (2018–20) and the University of Illinois (2021–22).

The team Walters inherits is also on the rise. Including an 8–6 finish in 2022, the Boilermakers earned eight wins in back-to-back seasons for the first time since 2006 and 2007. They also won their first Big Ten West Division title and appeared in the Big Ten Football Championship Game for the first time in program history.

The ascending coach and the emerging team seem like the perfect fit. Here, we get Walters's perspective on the season ahead.

What attracted you to Purdue?

My only previous encounter with Purdue was when Illinois played at Purdue and I was coaching defense. I learned then how lively the game-day atmosphere was. I also knew that Purdue was prestigious academically and that Drew Brees played here, but that was about it. After the interview process, I was excited by the vision and alignment within the administration. My original vision was just for the program. But when I got to campus, I was blown away by the facilities, the town, and the support of the Purdue community. I keep getting more comfortable and more excited—everything feels like home now, and I count my blessings every day.

How important are alumni and fans to your success and the success of the team?

They're huge. You know, alumni are the reason why this place is what it is. Everybody bleeds gold and black. They built this place. The game has always been and will always be about the players, but alumni support is crucial. There are connections that need to be made. As a newcomer to the university, I don't know what I don't know. So alumni support and the opportunity to bounce ideas off them and get information from them is especially important.

How would you describe your connection with your own alma mater, the University of Colorado?

My time at Colorado meant a lot to me—my father played there before me, and I followed in his footsteps. I donate to a scholarship fund in both of our names. But as a professional football coach, you sort of lose the nostalgia factor once you start putting your time into universities and programs that you coach for and could potentially play against. So, my home is in West Lafayette now.

How would you characterize your approach to coaching?

I believe that every player on the roster is a unique individual. I think the relationship piece is hugely important. I'm a teacher first—I like to dive into the whys of what we're doing and how we're doing it. I recognize that I have played my last down; this is about the players in the locker room, how they perform, and how we provide them with the tools and blueprints to cut it loose on the field.

How do you plan on building on the team's recent success?

The improvement Purdue has shown in the last few years is another reason why I was attracted to this position. It's my job now to raise the standard to sustain success here. I think that is possible because of the conference we're in, the location, the administrative support, and the fan base. We want to continue to elevate what has already been established here.

What are your feelings about being one of Purdue's most prominent ambassadors?

My role is to be a leader for one of the departments that is in the spotlight—not necessarily to be the face of the university. This campus is so big, so encompassing, and so full of outstanding people and ideas that I shouldn't be the face of Purdue. My focus is on football.

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